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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 KABUL 000544

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SUBJECT: VIOLENT PROTESTS CONTINUE INTO SECOND DAY

REF: KABUL 532

Classified By: DCM RICHARD NORLAND FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

11. (C) SUMMARY. Violent anti-Danish and anti-Western demonstrations continued throughout Afghanistan on Tuesday, February 7. Norwegian-led PRT Maimana in northwestern Afghanistan came under small arms fire and grenade attack from a small group of protesters who breached the PRT perimeter. Dutch-led PRT Pol-e Komri in Baghlan province was also attacked by stone-throwing protesters. In Kabul, stone-throwing protesters demonstrated outside a US base and ISAF headquarters. Four ISAF soldiers total are reported injured, with three protesters likely killed. END SUMMARY.

Faryab: Attack on PRT Maimana

12. (C) The most significant activity took place in Maimana, capital of Faryab Province (northwestern Afghanistan), site of a Norwegian-led PRT. According to ISAF, 20-30 "demonstrators" were able to enter the outer perimeter of the PRT compound, firing small arms and throwing hand grenades. Three Norwegian PRT soldiers were wounded. PRT forces fired warning shots, and a British Quick Reaction Force from RAC-North deployed to Maimana. Reports indicate that the protesters pulled back from the PRT after the Afghan National Police (ANP) opened fire, but that as of 1600 local time, the demonstrators were still in place. The Deputy Governor of Faryab Province was also on the scene trying to convince the demonstrators to cease. The only confirmed Afghan casualty appears to have been one protester who blew himself up with his own grenade, although other reports indicate three protesters may have been killed by the police. Unconfirmed reports indicate the protesters may have taken their weapons from the local ANP battalion, which had been in Maimana only two months and was slow to respond to the crisis.

Kabul: Stone-throwing Continues

13. (U) Several small protests took place in Kabul on February 7, including some violent demonstrations. A 200-300-person protest in the Wazir Akbar Khan district, home to many Embassies, included demonstrators throwing stones at civilian vehicles and police. This group of protesters demonstrated outside ISAF HQ, the compound next to the US Embassy, and outside CFC-A Camp Eggers. Police fired shots in the air in order to break it up. Reports indicate that after a gunfight on Jalalabad Road, three armed protesters and two police were injured.

Baghlan: Small Attack on PRT Pol-e Komri

14. (U) Kunduz-based PRToff reports two demonstrations in Baghlan province in northern Afghanistan. A group of around 150 people protested in front of the Dutch-led PRT in Pol-e Komri. After the demonstrators began throwing rocks into the PRT, PRT soldiers threw smoke and concussion grenades into the crowd. ANP and ANA later came and dispersed the crowd. Reports indicated that one ISAF soldier was injured by a stone and two protesters were injured. Another protest in Pol-e Komri temporarily closed the main highway north to Kunduz from Kabul.

Small Protests in Other Provinces

15. (U) There were scattered protests in towns along the Kabul-Kandahar highway in Ghazni and Wardak provinces. In Ghazni province (Sayadabad), a small demonstration (150-300 people) pelted an OSC-A vehicle with rocks, breaking several windows. In Wardak province (Salar), demonstrators threw rocks at an IOM vehicle.

16. (U) In Herat, the Italian PRT reported a small, peaceful demonstration at Governor's palace. In Jalalabad, small demonstrations were also dispersed quickly by the police. In

Badakhshan, demonstrations took place on the main road east out of Faizabad city, blocking traffic for several hours. ANSO reports a UN vehicle in Faizabad was hit by stones, with no injuries. Small, peaceful protests also continued to take place in Mehterlam (Laghman province).

Bombings in Kandahar and Wardak

17. (SBU) Two attacks on police stations also occurred on February 7. In Kandahar, a large explosion outside the police headquarters compound killed at least twelve people, mostly police officers, injuring 12-13 more. A Taliban spokesman claimed responsibility for this attack. In Wardak, a vehicle-borne IED exploded outside the police station in Maidan Shahr, killing one police officer. These attacks do not appear directly related to the anti-cartoon protests.

International Response

18. (SBU) Danish Embassy joined the Norwegians in relocating their staff to the airport on Monday, where Danish forces are located as part of the ISAF base. The Danish Chief of Mission was scheduled to return to Afghanistan today, and they are currently working on coming up with a comprehensive response. The UN pulled their international staff out of Faryab, with several NGOs following suit. Many Embassies, NGOs and UN offices have issued orders to minimize travel for the next few days.

19. (SBU) ISAF headquarters stated that it is not able to intervene to protect international staff in Afghanistan except "in extremis," when no other organization is able to provide assistance. It did, however, offer shelter inside PRTs to expatriate NGO staff in multiple circumstances.

GOA Response

10. (U) On February 5, Supreme Court Chief Justice Shinwari called for a boycott of Danish products and for the GOA to sever relations with the Danish government.

Comment

11. (C) Wednesday, February 8 marks the beginning of Ashura, a two-day holiday for Shiite Muslims usually marked by large parades and demonstrations. Preparations for the event are already evident in Shiite areas of Kabul and elsewhere in Afghanistan. There will be demonstrations across the country for the next two days as part of holiday celebrations, which could easily include anti-Western slogans. The prospect of additional violence is uncertain. While small groups of protesters could cause violence, the primary instigators of violence are believed to be Sunni, not Shia Muslims.

12. (C) The protests do, however, demonstrate that the network of local religious leaders in Afghanistan remains one of the strongest in the country. Local elders even in remote districts (such as Dih Yak in Ghazni province, on the border with Paktika and Paktia) demonstrate a high level of awareness about the controversy in conversations with international officials.

13. (C) Maimana PRT had been very quiet prior to these attacks. The Finns and Norwegians stationed at the PRT had put a strong focus on development projects and had reported good relations with the local population. While it is currently unclear what led to these attacks on this PRT, the fact that the only Scandinavian-led PRT in Afghanistan faced the most serious attack indicates that they may have been more organized leadership behind the protest. While it is too soon to analyze the effectiveness of the PRT, ANA and ANP response, Post is continuing to gather information from the provinces. END COMMENT.
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